

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford at Evensong
The Second Sunday of Easter
April 12, 2015
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On Easter Day evening the Risen Lord Jesus sanctioned the principle of asking about the foundations of our religious faith. The Lord *invited* our inquiry. He said, “See My hands and feet, and place your hand in My side.” In other words, touch Me if that will help you escape illusion and accept Truth. Use every means of inquiry God has given you in order to test the claims of the Church. But do it *fairly* and without prejudice.

Accepting the Lord’s invitation is no easy matter! A soul dulled by sin is greatly impoverished and handicapped in its attempt to look into the things of God. C.S. Lewis once commented on that fact. He said it was like looking at a starry night sky through a dirty telescope! You don’t see everything. Truth be told, we are all children of our age. We receive from it more than we recognize and admit, and it is more than we reject and resist. All of us are eager to share the *benefits* of the secular world, and on the vast majority of us that world leaves its scar. We inherit many of the world’s prejudices, its errors, and its illusions.

However daunting this situation, it is not new! Saint Peter long ago gave this advice to Christians: “Add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge.” (2 Peter 1:5) In other words, the believer’s way is a step-by-step enterprise. The Christian must cultivate virtue and *then* comes true knowledge. If we operate with the dirty telescope our inquiry will be flawed. Just like a surgeon who enters the operating room with dirt under his fingernails, we may do more damage than good. So we are warned.

The task of Christ’s disciples is always a challenge to their own character. You and I cannot possibly teach anyone else to be what we are not trying to be ourselves. How can I ask someone to follow Christ if I do not follow Christ? Remember that Christian faith is not a simple matter of accepting facts...that the truth of Christ is or isn’t evident and accepted in our minds. Our faith does not depend upon our minds but upon what we are in our *character*. It is our character that thinks with the mind and uses it to seek after God. An artist sees with his eyes and translates what he sees onto his canvas. But another artist may have very defective eyesight and yet be a much greater painter. The mind, like our bodily senses, only gets us so

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far. We see and think *from our character*. And the character may be seeking after God or it may be seeking something else.

Our Lord Jesus once said, "I know the kind of men I chose." You and I believe we are chosen. That is to say we are Christians not by accident but by conviction. Initially it is *Christ's* conviction. But it doesn't end there! Our moral and spiritual growth as Christ's followers will be healthy growth to the extent what we have learned from the testimony of the Church, and infused by grace, is constantly invigorated by being observed, thought out, handled, and practiced, by a character that uses its mind to seek after God. As instructed by Saint Peter, we are to *cultivate Christian virtue*. To a very great extent we believe and teach that which our character is becoming, as Christ has given us the light.